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### Deposited in DRO:

23 January 2018

### Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

### Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

### Citation for published item:

Gray, Patrick (2019) 'Shakespeare versus Aristotle : Anagnorisis, repentance, and acknowledgment.', *Journal of medieval and early modern studies.*, 49 (1). pp. 85-111.

### Further information on publisher's website:

<https://read.dukeupress.edu/jmems>

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### Additional information:

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**Shakespeare vs. Aristotle:**

***Anagnorisis, Repentance, and Acknowledgment***

Teaching Shakespeare to undergraduates, I have noticed that they seem to arrive already committed to a default notion of Shakespearean tragedy, a foundation which, howsoever dubious, seems to be of venerable age and provenance, and which often proves in the end unshakeable. Others seem to have noticed the same phenomenon: David Bromwich calls this default setting "a theory we are all taught sooner or later," "usually sooner." As a narrative, the account runs more or less as follows. The tragic hero has a tragic flaw. This moral vulnerability is profound but sharply limited, like a hairline fracture in an otherwise-perfect diamond. It stems from, but is not reducible to, the idiosyncrasies of his temperament, as well as the contingencies of his context. Playing upon his judgment like a will-o'-the-wisp, this highly specific, individual weakness leads the tragic figure toward some preventable, understandable misstep, an error with unforeseen yet disastrous consequences, culminating in his own ignominious death. Just before he dies, however, in a sudden flash of insight, the protagonist realizes how and why he went

wrong, and he repents. "He discovers what happened to him," Bromwich explains, "and learns how far his character is implicated in his fate." Yielding to "reflection" and "remorse," "the agent unmask himself and is startled at what he finds." This new understanding of himself, acquired at great cost, provides some final consolation to the audience: "some counterpoise of enlightenment."<sup>1</sup> We see ourselves writ large in the hero and learn to avoid his mistakes. As Rolf Soellner observes, "We have become fond of saying that Shakespeare's tragic heroes are destroyed because they do not know themselves." "Surely," he adds, a "major reason" for the "popularity" of this account is "the indistinct hope that we can learn something from their failures."<sup>2</sup>

As a thumbnail sketch of Shakespearean tragedy, one could do worse. Problems arise, however, when students or other critics try to map this pattern onto Aristotle's Poetics. What Aristotle means by hamartia is not what they mean by a "tragic flaw." A better analogue would be what Calvin calls a "special sin," or Alexander Pope, a "ruling passion."<sup>3</sup> Likewise, Shakespeareans' appropriation of the term anagnorisis tends to be too expansive. When critics talk about anagnorisis in Shakespeare's plays, the sort of

recognition they describe is not usually the kind of simple, instantaneous revelation Aristotle has in mind, an external identification of another person, but instead more typically a variation on the vivid accounts of internal metanoia [lit. afterthought, change of heart] which figure prominently and repeatedly throughout the New Testament.<sup>4</sup> What Aristotle is referring to is not any kind of holistic, heartfelt moral awakening, but instead much more matter-of-fact: the kind of a "aha!" moment that might figure in a crime novel. The examples that he cites include, for instance, Euryclea in the Odyssey recognizing the stranger visiting Penelope as Odysseus when she sees the scar on his thigh (1454b25-8), or Orestes in Euripides' Iphigenia in Tauris recognizing the queen who holds him captive as his sister Iphigenia when she dictates a message revealing her identity to his fellow prisoner Pylades (1455a18-22).

Aristotle goes on to argue that some kinds of anagnorisis are better than others. "The least artistic kind," albeit "the most common," arises from "poverty [of imagination]," and works through "signs [and tokens]" such as Odysseus's scar (1454b20-32) or other such "invented signs and amulets" (1455a24). The best kind comes about instead "from the events themselves, when the shock of

surprise arises from likely circumstances." In the case of Euripides' *Iphigenia*, for example, "naturally she wanted to send the message" (1455a18-22). As Kathy Eden points out, this contrast between different types of anagnorisis in the Poetics corresponds to the distinction between "signs" and "probability" as tools of forensic persuasion that Aristotle sets out in his Rhetoric. "The means of tragic recognition," she explains, "coincide with the orator's instruments of proof."<sup>5</sup> "In keeping with his evaluation of these proofs in the Rhetoric," Aristotle prefers "the discovery which emerges as a consequence of the logical disposition of events over the one which relies on the spectacular effect of the simple sign or palpable proof."<sup>6</sup> Eden's alternative translation of anagnorisis as "tragic discovery," rather than "recognition," highlights this analogy to "legal discovery": the disclosure of evidence in a court of law.

Something very closely akin to the kind of anagnorisis or "discovery" that Aristotle describes in his Poetics does occur in Shakespeare's plays, but in a comic vein, rather than a tragic. In The Merchant of Venice, for example, when Portia and Nerissa return the rings that they gave to Bassanio and Gratiano back to them again, they reveal that

they were the ones who had played the parts of the "doctor of law," Balthazar, and his clerk, in the arbitration of the dispute between Antonio and Shylock; they were the ones who took the rings, while they were in disguise, and they will not punish their new husbands, therefore, for giving the rings away. By far the most striking such moments, however, serve as resolutions to Shakespeare's late romances. In The Winter's Tale, Leontes discovers that his wife, Hermione, is not dead, as he thought, but standing before him, in the guise of what he initially believes is a statue. In his defense of "that very great play," Pericles, in his second Edinburgh Lecture, Eliot argues that "the finest" of all such "recognition scenes" is Pericles' reunion with his daughter, Marina, whom he had assumed was dead; the scene serves as the basis for his own earlier poem, "Marina."<sup>7</sup> "What seas what shores what grey rocks and what islands"? "What is this face"? Eliot's lyric narrator asks. "My daughter." The opening line echoes Pericles's question to Marina: "What countrywoman? / Here of these shores?" (5.1.102-3). And the conclusion, too, repeats Pericles's own: "O my daughter" (5.1.5), "my daughter" (5.1.35). The most complex such scene, however, is the conclusion to Cymbeline. As Piero Boitani observes, "this

extraordinary sequence brings all of the principal characters on stage." "In order to untie all the knots of the plot," Shakespeare's rapid-fire, multipolar, tour de force anagnorisis "articulates itself over almost four hundred lines, entailing sixteen successive moments of revelation."<sup>8</sup>

In his critique of what Charles Taylor calls "the politics of recognition," Patchen Markell distinguishes between "recognition," as Taylor and others use the term, and what Stanley Cavell describes in contrast as "acknowledgment." "The source of relations of subordination lies not in the failure to recognize the identity of the other, but in the failure to acknowledge one's own basic situation and circumstances."<sup>9</sup> That is to say, the primary problem with identity politics as it is usually pursued is not so much political resistance as it is the kind of identity that it presumes to exist and that it asks its adherents to demand each other recognize. It continues to invoke the "sovereign self" that it ostensibly aims to displace.<sup>10</sup> "What's acknowledged in an act of acknowledgment is not one's own identity - at least, not as the politics of recognition conceives of identity: a coherent self-description that can serve as the ground of agency, guiding

or determining what we are to do." Instead, "acknowledgment is directed at the basic conditions of one's own existence and activity, including, crucially, the limits of 'identity' as a ground of action, limits which arise out of our constitutive vulnerability to the unpredictable reactions and responses of others." Acknowledgment is, in brief, "an avowal of one's own finitude."<sup>11</sup>

Given that anagnorisis is often translated as "recognition," Markell then asks what anagnorisis might have to do, if anything, with "acknowledgment," as opposed to "recognition." Ancient Greek tragedy, he argues, clarifies the distinction that he draws between these terms. "From a tragic perspective, efforts to achieve sovereign agency are themselves ethically and politically problematic misrecognitions - not misrecognitions of the identity of the other, as that term usually implies, but failures to acknowledge key aspects of our own situation, including especially our own finitude in relation to the future."<sup>12</sup> Markell then reads Sophocles' Antigone as a study in "the importance of human plurality as a source of vulnerability in human action." "The fact of human freedom, which is the condition of possibility of effective agency, also limits our practical capabilities because it is not



exclusively ours but is mirrored in others."<sup>13</sup> Markell aligns Sophocles in this respect with Aristotle's larger sense of human nature. As Martha Nussbaum demonstrates, Aristotle, too, has a keen sense of what she calls "the fragility of goodness."<sup>14</sup>

Probably the master of this kind of anagnorisis-as-acknowledgment is Jane Austen. Examples include Elizabeth Bennett's discovery of the truth about Mr. Wickham in Pride and Prejudice, Marianne's discovery of the truth about Willoughby in Sense and Sensibility, and Emma's discovery of the truth about Frank Churchill in Emma. In each case, the character in question discovers, as Markell says, "our own finitude in relation to the future." Shakespeare, however, seems to have a different end in mind. The purpose of the recognition scenes that characterize and conclude his late plays is above all theological. As T. S. Eliot explains, "The personages in Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, The Tempest, and Pericles are the work of a writer who has finally seen through the dramatic action of men into a spiritual action which transcends it."<sup>15</sup> Piero Boitani goes so far as to describe these last plays as "the New Testament of William Shakespeare."<sup>16</sup> The unlikely coincidences and supernatural events that allow unexpected

reunions to occur are not flaws, as George Bernard Shaw was wont to complain, but instead deliberate devices designed to foreground their significance as evidence of a benevolent divine providence, symbolized in Pericles by the music of the spheres. We are supposed to marvel at the supernatural order that guides the characters to their just reward and to welcome its manifestation, as we do at the miracles that we read about in the Gospels. "Pity and fear," as Aristotle says, are a natural response to ancient Greek tragedy, given its assumptions about theology.

Anagnorisis in Shakespeare's late plays is designed in contrast to produce gratitude and peace of mind. We are thankful, relieved, precisely because the Christian God, represented here symbolically, turns out to be so very different from Seneca's indifferent, empty cosmos; Euripides' cruel, vindictive gods; or the inscrutable, amoral, inexorable, impersonal fate that eventually destroys Sophocles' Oedipus, despite his efforts to elude its grasp.<sup>17</sup>

Anagnorisis, then, as Aristotle uses the term, is not without its uses as a concept within Shakespeare studies. Problems tend to arise, however, when it is brought to bear on his tragedies, rather than his late plays. Here

anagnorisis has come to serve, in effect, as a euphemism: a secular alternative to the more obvious, more familiar, and more fitting Christian term, "repentance." "The idea of a buildup in tragedy that moves toward a self-recognition has come to seem intuitively right," Bromwich grants. "But where does the intuition come from?"<sup>18</sup> The question is surprising, if only because the answer is so ready to hand: the abiding cultural influence of Christianity, even among those who do not think of themselves as sharing a Christian perspective. What we are looking for, whether we realize it or not, is a secular analogue of the Christian narrative of the conversion of a sinner. We want what preachers call a "road to Damascus" or "come to Jesus" moment: the transformation of the zealous persecutor, Saul, pitched off his horse, struck blind, healed, into St. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. Northrop Frye, for instance, sees "the archetypal human tragedy" in "the story of Adam." "The discovery or anagnorisis which comes at the end of the tragic plot is not simply the knowledge by the hero of what happened to him ... but the recognition of the determined shape of the life he has created for himself, with an implicit comparison with the uncreated potential life he has forsaken."<sup>19</sup> Even given the recent "religious turn" in

Shakespeare scholarship, many critics, however, like Bromwich, still tend to be reluctant to concede that Shakespeare's thought about ethics is inextricable from the influence of Christian theology. They appeal to Aristotle as a work-around, even at the cost of obscuring his original meaning.

Further complicating the picture is the fact that metanoia [repentance] on the part of the protagonist, consistently mislabeled anagnorisis [discovery], does not always occur at the close of Shakespeare's tragedies, at least not in any straightforward sense. The central figure does not always arrive at what Bromwich calls "self-knowledge." What exactly does Lear, for example, recognize about himself, in the end? When tragic heroes do repent, their repentance often seems to be somehow incomplete. Finally, and not least, the template of Shakespearean tragedy which I have outlined above leaves out a crucial piece of the puzzle. Repentance as Shakespeare sees it tends to be prompted, if at all, by a third and very different kind of "recognition": the reciprocal process of intersubjective self-definition Hegel calls Anerkennung.<sup>20</sup> As he explains in his Phenomenology, "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so

exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged."<sup>21</sup> Put in plainer language, we come to know ourselves, to the extent that we ever do, by noticing and accepting how we are perceived by other people.

This form of recognition, Anerkennung, has become familiar within Shakespeare studies through a related concept, the process Stanley Cavell calls "acknowledgment."<sup>22</sup> Cavell's fascination with intersubjectivity emerges out of his engagement with the skeptical problem of knowing other minds. In response to Wittgenstein's arguments against the possibility of a private language, Cavell asserts the possibility of what he calls "avoidance." An individual can be aware of something, he maintains, and yet at the same time balk at that awareness, shy away from it, work around it, even within his or her own private thoughts. Knowledge is like a pool of water, in which any given insight can be either submerged or else brought up to the surface. Thus, some degree of skeptical solipsism is possible.

According to Cavell, acknowledgment of discomfiting, humbling facts about ourselves cannot be accomplished alone, but instead requires us to engage with other people. "We must learn to reveal ourselves; to allow ourselves to

be seen."<sup>23</sup> Only then can we dredge up the truth about ourselves. As Patchen Markell explains, "to acknowledge another is in the first instance to respond to, to act in the light of, something about oneself; and conversely, the failure of acknowledgement, the 'avoidance' of the other, is crucially a distortion of one's own self-relation, an avoidance of something unbearable about oneself."<sup>24</sup> This understanding of the role of the other in self-knowledge helps account for the Christian practice of confession, as well as its secular counterpart, psychoanalysis. As M. Scott Peck observes, in his psychiatric study of what he calls "people of the lie," "the central defect of 'the evil' is not sin but the refusal to acknowledge it." "At one and the same time 'the evil' are aware of their evil and desperately trying to avoid the awareness. We become evil by attempting to hide from ourselves."<sup>25</sup>

Why does Jesus call the devil "the father of lies" (John 8:44)? The devil "chose to live according to himself," St. Augustine maintains, "when he did not remain in the truth, so that the lie he spoke had to do with himself, not with God." The devil was "the first to lie, and the lie, like sin, began from him."<sup>26</sup> For St. Augustine, sin is "perversity and lack of order, that is, a turning

away from the creator, who is more excellent, and a turning to the creatures, which are inferior."<sup>27</sup> As Paul Griffiths puts it, "Sin's characteristic mark is self-serving aversion: sinners turn their faces away from God and attempt, narcissistically, to look only at themselves."<sup>28</sup> One of St. Augustine's favorite passages from Scripture is Sirach 10:13, which reads, in the Latin version known to him, initium omnis peccati est superbia [The origin of all sin is pride]. As St. Augustine explains, "The soul, delighting in its own power, slips away from the whole shared by all to the particular, which is private to itself. If it had followed God as guide it would have been able to be ideally governed by God's laws along with all creatures. But by that apostate pride which is called the beginning of sin it wants something more than the whole and schemes to control it with its own law."<sup>29</sup> By its very nature, all sin is solipsistic, and for this reason, St. Augustine argues, "all sin is a lie."<sup>30</sup>

Why do the lies prompted by pride lead to a breakdown, then, in our relations with each other, as well as God? As St. Augustine observes, "the one who loves the sins against which he has been warned hates the light warning him and runs from it so that the actions he loves might not be

shown to be evil."<sup>31</sup> If we cannot escape such messengers, we sometimes turn to violence, like Shakespeare's Cleopatra, when she almost kills the unfortunate slave who brings her the news that Antony has married Octavia. "The cause of tragedy," Cavell concludes, "is that we would rather murder the world than permit it to expose us to change."<sup>32</sup> In Macbeth, for example, as Christopher Tilmouth observes, "conscience is mediated through real and imagined public gazes," "a body of knowledge about the usurper's shameful deeds" which other people "keep threatening to put Macbeth's everyday self in mind of." Like Lear, when he banishes first Cordelia, then Kent, Macbeth "strives to repel" this "oppressive knowledge," rather than accept it, "by eliminating those in whom it is seemingly invested."<sup>33</sup>

"Evil" as Peck defines it means hurting others in order to preserve a pleasing notion of ourselves, one that we surmise might well be false, but that we are afraid, nonetheless, to abandon. "Why? What possesses them, drives them?" Peck asks. "Basically, it is fear. They are terrified that the pretense will break down and they will be exposed to the world and to themselves."<sup>34</sup> "The mother of cruelty," as Montaigne says, turns out to be "cowardice." Seen in this light, Cavell's account of tragedy and the



Christian explanation of sin are remarkably similar. The root of the problem, in both cases, is self-deception, driven by a fear of shame. "To overcome knowing," Cavell notes, "is a task Lear shares with Othello and Macbeth and Hamlet."<sup>35</sup> The plays in question end in tragedy because their protagonists are "unwilling," as Peck says, "to suffer the discomfort of significant self-examination."<sup>36</sup> They refuse to participate in what St. Augustine describes in more familiar, Christian terms as "confession."

The epicenter of debate about repentance in Shakespeare's tragedies, under the guise of anagnorisis, is Othello's final speech. Ernest Schanzer defines anagnorisis as "the realization of having, through one's own blind folly, cut oneself off for ever from all that makes for joy" and cites this speech as a paradigmatic example. "The experience is undergone by Othello when he realizes that he has, with his own hands, killed the woman on whom all his happiness depended." Other case studies Schanzer adduces include Lear, Macbeth, and Milton's Satan. "It is this recognition which makes the Hell in the mind of Milton's Satan burn so fiercely; which makes him, in his soliloquy on Mount Niphates, seek so desperately to lay the burden of blame on God."<sup>37</sup> Ruth Nevo describes "Othello's

anagnorisis," meaning, his "self-judgment," as "utterly unexonerating." "No court of law can fathom his case to its depths as he does."<sup>38</sup>

Much to the contrary, T. S. Eliot sees Othello's repentance as inadequate. "What Othello seems to me to be doing in this speech," he writes, "is cheering himself up. He is endeavoring to escape reality; he has ceased to think about Desdemona, and is thinking about himself." Eliot sees similar instances of what he calls "bovarysme," "the human will to see things as they are not," in "the deaths of several of Shakespeare's heroes," including "notably" Coriolanus and Mark Antony, as well as Othello. "Humility is the most difficult of all virtues to achieve; nothing dies harder than the desire to think well of oneself."<sup>39</sup> Soellner concurs: "Othello's conscious judgment of himself is defective." "That Othello loved not wisely, one agrees; but that he loved too well is hardly true: surely the greatest kind of love is not one that leads to precipitous jealousy. When Othello calls himself 'not easily jealous,' he denies what in the course of little more than a day has taken place." Nevertheless, Soellner objects, Eliot's tone is too dismissive. Shakespeare's "noble Moor" is not "merely a romantic liar": "he appears to be intent on

telling his story aright." The "dim and partial recognition of the truth" Shakespeare gives to Othello is "psychologically and dramatically appropriate," given that he is still "in the grip of passion."<sup>40</sup>

A. D. Nuttall extends this kind of analysis to King Lear. "At the end of Othello," he observes, "the hero is given a big speech having all the formal marks of ultimate anagnorisis but notably lacking the thing itself."

Likewise, he suggests, the Folio version of *King Lear* ends with a moment of "false anagnorisis." "Lear is given what seems to be a moment of perception, a sudden intuition (of life in the dead child) - but an intuition which is wholly mistaken." Shakespeare revises the Quarto version so that the "deeply moving moral anagnorisis" apparent "in the middle-to-later part of the play" is "erased at the end."<sup>41</sup>

Other critics such as Nevo and Soellner choose to emphasize Lear's earlier moment of repentance: Nevo, for instance, marvels at "the simplicity and humility of the unadorned anagnorisis he has of himself."<sup>42</sup> When Lear "kneels and confesses to be a foolish, fond old man," Soellner argues, this "visionary insight" is "accompanied by a new and true humility." "For a moment, a precious moment, Lear knows - or, better, feels - who, what, and what manner of man he

is. This is his anagnorisis."<sup>43</sup> Bromwich, however, moves in the opposite direction. What seems to be a change of heart, he maintains, is not as profound as it appears. Even in his final conversations with Cordelia, Lear does not arrive at "a moral understanding of good and evil." He is "moved to see his errors," but "he knows them only as rash judgments or wrong perceptions"; "he does not recognize in himself a character that was formed to make such 'unconstant starts' the pattern of his old age."<sup>44</sup> Cavell, too, is suspicious of Lear's apparent repentance in this moment, seeing it not as a "correction" but instead a "repetition" of "his strategy in the first scene." "He is anxious to go off to prison," Cavell suggests, because "he cannot finally face the thing he has done"; "he cannot bear being seen."<sup>45</sup>

According to Bromwich, the "moral anagnorisis" Nuttall identifies in the "middle-to-later part of the play" and sees, like Soellner, as part of the resolution of *King Lear* is itself a "false anagnorisis." In this sense, the tragedy is less like the story of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4 and instead more like Shakespeare's own Macbeth. Lear's affectation of "stoical wisdom" in his speech, "Come, let's away to prison," is like Macbeth's affection of nihilism in his speech, "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow": in

both cases, the protagonist is, as Eliot would say, "cheering himself up," rather than acknowledging the full weight and consequence of his misdeeds. Bromwich notes that "Faulkner, Sartre, and other moderns" have admired Macbeth's soliloquy for its supposed "universality." Nevertheless, he insists, "it is an instance as fine as any in Shakespeare of the fitting of words to a particular character at a particular time."<sup>46</sup> Soellner, too, questions Macbeth's claim that life is "a tale / Told by an idiot," "signifying nothing" (5.2.25-27). "The utter impersonality of this most pessimistic passage in all Shakespeare marks it not as the poet's ipse dixit, but as a dramatic expression of the price of self-loss": "with the loss of his moral self, Macbeth has gained only a meaningless life."<sup>47</sup> Macbeth's disingenuousness here, Bromwich suggests, is apparent in his tone: he seems "oddly satisfied" with his bleak pontifications. He consoles himself for his downfall by "framing his metaphysics so as to suppose that no one is much better off than himself."<sup>48</sup>

What then of Richard II? A. D. Nuttall maintains that "Richard II terminates, satisfyingly, in anagnorisis." By the end of the play, he argues, "Richard has grown up, matured to the point of full anagnorisis, in the sense in

which that term applies to Sophocles' Oedipus," i.e., "self-understanding."<sup>49</sup> As a pattern of thorough-going repentance, Richard II seems prima facie an odd choice. Leontes in The Winter's Tale or Posthumus in Cymbeline spring more immediately to mind. But there is a parallel, nonetheless, to Othello which makes Richard a surprisingly apt counterpoint. T. S. Eliot's criticism of Othello is more precisely that he adopts "an aesthetic rather than a moral attitude, dramatizing himself against his environment."<sup>50</sup> In Nuttall's analysis, Richard makes the opposite choice. He relinquishes his "aesthetic" posturing, in the end, in favor of "moral" self-knowledge. Initially, Richard is "an evident fantasist," "glassed in with words." He turns "his own imminent fate" into "a story": "it is as if he knows everything about his situation except the fact that it is actually happening to him." "After the stripping away of his public identity," however, "Richard's verbal behavior changes." His language "repents," as it were, "of its own formalism."<sup>51</sup>

Othello returns in the end, despite all, to what G. Wilson Knight describes as "the Othello music."<sup>52</sup> Richard in contrast, over the course of the play, questions and perhaps, as Nuttall suggests, finally dismantles the

elaborate, highly-artificial manner of speech which at the beginning seems his most salient characteristic. Soellner, likewise, sees some measure of repentance, even if not the "full anagnorisis" Nuttall claims for Richard. Much like Lear when he says to Cordelia, "Come, let's away to prison," Richard "assumes a contemptus mundi attitude which is, at first, more of a posture than a conviction." This attitude, however, "gradually" becomes "increasingly sincere"; Richard "grows toward a limited self-awareness," even if "he does not totally lose his latent vanity." Soellner finds himself uncomfortable with using the term anagnorisis to describe this process, even though he remains unsure what else to call it. "If we use the Aristotelian term," he decides, "we must redefine it."<sup>53</sup> As Nuttall concedes, "Anagnorisis in Aristotle is normally a simple recognition of some long-lost person, as it might be through signs or tokens."<sup>54</sup> Simon Haines calls it "recognition-as-someone-in-particular": "an unknown [sc. person] is suddenly revealed as a known."<sup>55</sup> Richard's case is considerably more complex: more internal, more intangible, and more incremental. As Soellner concludes, "Richard's self-search and partial self-finding have moral and religious dimensions that Aristotle's anagnorisis does

not have and could not have had." His "recognitions are much less intellectual than is Oedipus's"; they include "a confession of sins."<sup>56</sup>

An example of what Aristotle means by anagnorisis does figure prominently in Richard II: York's discovery, by means of an on-stage sign or token, in this case, a letter, that his son Aumerle is part of a conspiracy aiming to kill Henry IV. The debate that ensues between York and his wife, in their pleas before the newly-crowned Bolingbroke, as to whether or not their son's life should be spared re-enacts the kind of tension between duty to family and duty to the state apparent in Sophocles' Antigone. But the center of Shakespeare's tragedy is elsewhere: the deposition, sometimes called "the mirror scene." And the culmination of this scene is a particular exchange. Richard refuses to read out a list of his crimes, calls for a looking-glass, looks at himself in it, then shatters it in front of Bolingbroke. Why does this moment feel so important?

"Neither anagnorisis nor Anerkennung," Haines concludes, "seems quite adequate to capture all that recognition might increasingly have meant to Shakespeare as his thought evolved."<sup>57</sup> One missing element, I would suggest, from Haines's analysis is a Christian one:



repentance. Shakespeare puts the decision of key characters whether or not to repent at the heart of all of his plays, including not only tragedies such as Richard II, but also comedies such as Much Ado About Nothing, Twelfth Night, and The Merchant of Venice. The suspense that we feel, especially if we do not already know the plot, is our uncertainty about whether or not the character in question, be it Malvolio or Macbeth, will come to his senses, realize the error of his ways, and choose to change, before the consequences of his persistent yielding to his "tragic flaw" become catastrophic. We wait for repentance with bated breath, precisely because Shakespeare's characters seem so free to ignore this possibility, if they wish. That capacity to balk at the prospect of a change of heart, the freedom of a sinner not to acknowledge his own sin, is especially apparent here, in this scene. Despite all the pressure brought to bear by Northumberland, as well as Bolingbroke, Richard point-blank refuses to read out the list they hand him of his "grievous crimes" (4.1.223). "Must I do so?" he asks. "Must I ravel out / My weaved-up follies?" (4.1.228-29).<sup>58</sup> As it turns out, he does not. Relying on his singular capacity for histrionic grandstanding, Richard manages to make such a scene that

Bolingbroke relents and lets him leave, instead, the "record" of his "offenses" still unread (4.1.230).

A comic analogue of Richard's mirror scene appears in the next play in the tetralogy; not in a throne room, this time, but in a tavern in Eastcheap. Even after Falstaff learns that the prince and his companions saw him run away at Gad's Hill, nothing they can say seems able to compel him to confess his manifest cowardice. Instead, as Poins predicts, he takes refuge in "incomprehensible lies" (1.2.176). "Come, tell us," Hal cries (2.4.226). "What, upon compulsion? Zounds," Falstaff protests, "an I were at the strappado, or all the racks in the world, I would not tell you on compulsion" (2.4.229-31). Although now in a more light-hearted guise, Shakespeare is making the same deadly serious point here that he did in Richard's deposition: repentance cannot be forced. The crux of Shakespearean drama is our free will, apparent in our decision whether or not to be honest with ourselves about our own moral character. Internal metanoia of this kind cannot be secured by any kind of external "compulsion."

As Blair Hoxby observes, "the twentieth century's most influential criticism of tragedy" tends to represent it as "either an unavoidable collision of ethical forces or a

conflict between freedom and necessity."<sup>59</sup> "An alternative vision," he argues, "may be found in the early modern poetics of tragedy," "the poetics that emerged around 1550 with the first major commentaries on Aristotle's Poetics and that continued to develop until the 1790s," when it began to be displaced by a new "idealist philosophy of the tragic."<sup>60</sup> Nineteenth-century Romantic efforts to appropriate Shakespeare as a precedent, a fellow traveler, and a rallying cry have proved so influential that they tend to be accepted without question, even to this day. Yet their claims do not always stand up to scrutiny.<sup>61</sup> Hoxby is right therefore to question whether Shakespeare's modus operandi in his tragedies does in fact conform to Romantic notions of the tragic.<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, however, Hoxby nonetheless retains underlying Romantic assumptions about Shakespeare's "secularism" and "supreme indifference to moral system"; presuppositions that he presents without evidence or further commentary, as if axiomatic.<sup>63</sup> What Hoxby misses, in other words, in the case of Shakespearean tragedy, is the Christian worldview that informs its structure. Shakespeare's tragic method is inseparable from his immersion in contemporary Christianity, as mediated through sixteenth-century Biblical drama, legally-

obligatory weekly sermons, and the Bible itself, newly-translated into English, and as distinct from the influence of Aristotelian poetics, as well as classical and neoclassical drama. Tragedy for Shakespeare is a sinner's failure to repent.<sup>64</sup> Tragedy for Aristotle, as for Sophocles, Euripides, and Seneca, is something very different.

"In Shakespeare's tragedies," A. C. Bradley writes, "we find no trace of fatalism in the more primitive, crude, and obvious forms: nothing that makes us think of the actions and sufferings of the persons as somehow arbitrarily fixed beforehand and without regard to their feelings, thoughts, and resolutions."<sup>65</sup> Shakespeare's strong emphasis on the possibility and desirability of repentance distinguishes his drama from Senecan tragedy, the most influential form of classical tragedy in the England of his day, as well as Aristotle's concept of tragedy, and aligns him instead with medieval Biblical drama. What will a given individual choose? Will he acknowledge his past sins and attempt to reform his behavior? Or will he drift ever further towards his own solipsistic self-destruction? As Stephen Halliwell observes, Aristotle is "uninterested in any such concept of the tragic hero."<sup>66</sup> Shakespeare's

tragedies are closer to morality plays such as Everyman and Mankind than they are to Sophocles' Oedipus. "In the world of classical tragedy," Bruce Smith explains, "larger-than-life heroes" are "destroyed by external forces." "In the world of the medieval morality plays, on the other hand, heroes with the life-size homeliness of Everyman are faced with moral choices."<sup>67</sup> Erich Auerbach draws the same distinction. In Shakespeare's plays, "the hero's character is depicted in greater and more varied detail than in antique tragedy, and participates more actively in shaping the individual's fate."<sup>68</sup>

Seen from the perspective of literary history, Shakespeare's focus on human moral freedom sets him apart from classical precedent. What distinguishes him from medieval English drama, in contrast, is his most acclaimed quality as a playwright: his "myriad-minded" characterization. This capacity to craft plausible, distinct individuals is not without an ethical and perhaps even theological dimension. "Why should we suppose it proper or valuable," Bromwich asks, "for the hero himself to be edified by the trial through which he passes?" Bromwich proposes "two main sources." One is Aristotle's Poetics. The other is "an intuition derived from

psychoanalysis and the high Romantic ideal of self-consciousness: namely, that there is a profound yet always evaded pattern to our thoughts and feelings and actions, a pattern which has been repressed and which we must struggle to bring to light." This "Romantic and analytic imperative," he observes, "goes back two hundred years now," and it is "natural," therefore, that we would look for its "confirmation" in Shakespeare, "the writer who is widely thought to have originated, as far as a single mind can have originated, our conception of individual character."<sup>69</sup>

Bromwich's hypothesis here is not so much incorrect as incomplete. He does not go back far enough, back to what Isaiah Berlin calls the "roots of Romanticism."<sup>70</sup> Psychoanalysis likewise, Foucault would say, was not invented by Freud, so much as secularized, revised, and given a new name.<sup>71</sup> Whence arises, more specifically, the idea that each individual psyche is distinct and unique? What is the nature of this master key, the "pattern" that Bromwich describes as "profound yet always evaded"? In his seminal study, Shakespearean Tragedy, A. C. Bradley describes the tragic hero as defined by what has come to be known as a "tragic flaw," often mislabeled hamartia. "We

observe a marked one-sidedness," he writes; "a predisposition in some particular direction; a total incapacity, in certain circumstances, of resisting the force which draws in this direction; a fatal tendency to identify the whole being with one interest, object, passion, or habit of mind. This, it would seem, is, for Shakespeare, the fundamental tragic trait."<sup>72</sup> The most obvious analogue for this "tragic trait," as Bradley describes it, is what Alexander Pope calls a "Ruling Passion."<sup>73</sup> "This clue once found," Pope says, "unravels all the rest."<sup>74</sup> Laurence Sterne calls it a "Hobby-Horse": "When a man gives himself up to the government of a ruling passion - or, in other words, when his Hobby-Horse grows headstrong - farewell cool reason and fair discretion."<sup>75</sup>

Ben Jonson draws upon an analogue and antecedent of this way of thinking when he bases some of his stage-characters on humoral psychology. But there is another source, as well, which is less widely-recognized. In Hamlet, Hamlet refers to "special providence," where "special" means "specific to an individual." Likewise, early modern English theologians and preachers such as William Perkins and Andrew Willet speak of "special sin," meaning what we might now call a "besetting sin," that is,

a bad habit or propensity characteristic of a given individual. In his treatise A Riche Storehouse, or Treasurie, for the Sicke, Full of Christian Counsels (1578), Caspar Huberinus writes, "our Lord God suffereth Sathan to trouble & to vex his, that he doth tempt them sometime with some special sinne, and plagueth them therewith, whereby they be moued or driuen first to knowe themselues, their weake nature & frailtie."<sup>76</sup> In The Reward of Religion (1596), Edward Topsell compares the distribution of such "special sins" to St. Paul's description of the diverse gifts of the Holy Spirit. "So the Lorde leaueth some to bee ouercome by their lustes, other by their money, many by their honour, some by their office, other by their pride, & euery man hath some speciall sinne that raigneth in him aboue other."<sup>77</sup> Hamlet himself explains the doctrine and connects it to more mundane questions of temperament and moral philosophy in his speech on what he calls "the vicious mole of nature" (1.4.13-38). Over the course of the speech, Hamlet shifts from physiological, to ethical, to theological language. This "one defect," he muses, this "particular fault," "breaking down the pales and forts of reason," could be "o'ergrowth of some complexion" (physiological) or "some



habit" (ethical). But it could also be "the dram of evil" (theological).<sup>78</sup>

As Walter Kaufmann points out, "It should be noted how very little Aristotle says about hamartia and how little he does with it. He uses the term once more, half a dozen lines later, then he drops it." Why then have we made a mountain of this molehill? "So unilluminating is Aristotle's doctrine of hamartia as far as Greek tragedy is concerned," Kaufmann argues, "that it would not be the most celebrated term in literary criticism if it did not seem to work so well with Shakespeare."<sup>79</sup> Part of the attraction, I suspect, of the term hamartia is precisely the brevity of Aristotle's presentation. By way of analogy, in his treatise De Anima, Aristotle makes a few cryptic remarks about the "active intellect."<sup>80</sup> Medieval commentators seized on this passage as the basis for amazingly elaborate arguments aligning Aristotle with Neo-Platonism, very much against the more obvious grain of his thought.<sup>81</sup> So, too, Aristotle's elliptical treatment of hamartia has provided critics with an opening to Christianize his thought about tragedy. As Terence Cave observes, "It is notorious that the sense of the word can shift from 'error' to 'fault',

'flaw', and other morally loaded terms, and that the shift radically affects the conception of tragedy in question."<sup>82</sup>

As Michael Lurie explains, Renaissance humanists went to great lengths to try to find a way to blame Oedipus for his fate, as part of a larger effort to Christianize Aristotle's Poetics, as well as to assert, by hook or by crook, the moral value of pagan tragedy.<sup>83</sup> Lurie draws particular attention to the influence of Protestant humanist Philipp Melanchthon. In his Cohortatio ad legendas tragoedias et comoedias, written in 1545, Melanchthon defends classical tragedy by arguing that it shows virtue rewarded and vice punished: in these plays, he insists, men see how "human misfortunes" are "brought about and exacerbated by depraved passions."<sup>84</sup> This Cohortatio went through eleven editions by the end of the sixteenth century; together with his lectures on Sophocles, it was much admired and imitated, and it remained a touchstone for interpretation of Greek tragedy for the entirety of Shakespeare's lifetime. "Throughout Europe," Lurie recounts, "Sophocles was relentlessly, though not always convincingly, subjected to the Christianization initiated by Melanchthon." Meanwhile, Lurie adds, "Aristotle's Poetics underwent a Christianizing and moralizing re-

interpretation of its own," "generated by dozens of learned commentaries and theoretical treatises written in Italy during the second half of the Cinquecento."<sup>85</sup>

In a forthcoming article, Bryan Brazeau complicates Lurie's history of the Renaissance reception of Aristotle's Poetics. Sixteenth-century commentaries on the Poetics by Italian humanists such as Robortello, Maggi, Vettori, and Piccolomini do translate hamartia with the Italian word for sin, peccato, rather than the more neutral term errore. Despite this diction, however, their interpretations of the Poetics hew closely to Aristotelian moral philosophy, rather than any kind of distinctively Christian ethical outlook. Lodovico Castelvetro's commentary, Poetica d'Aristotele vulgarizzata e sposta (1570), which went on to be the most influential of his cohort, does introduce a thoroughly Christian reading of the Poetics, in which hamartia is interpreted as voluntary sin. In Italy, however, this Christianizing cast of the mind was the exception, rather than the rule. Castelvetro's departure from his Italian contemporaries likely reflects his encounter with Protestant interpretations of Greek tragedy advanced by German authors such as Melanchthon, whose theological treatises Castelvetro had previously translated

into Italian.<sup>86</sup> In a forthcoming essay, Micha Lazarus, like Lurie, draws attention to an edition of Sophocles that came out of Wittenberg in the 1530s and 1540s. Lazarus contests Lurie's attribution of the edition to Melanchthon, although he grants that the Protestant scholar's influence is "felt in every corner of the volume." Printed in Frankfurt in 1547, the volume is dedicated to King Edward VI of England, and Lazarus makes a strong case for its influence on sixteenth-century English Poetics, including not only Christianizing readings of ancient Greek and Latin tragedy, but also an efflorescence of new "Scriptural tragedy on a classical model," written in neo-Latin by Protestant Reformers.<sup>87</sup>

Both Lazarus and Brazeau push back strongly against the assumption that Christian appropriation of Aristotle's Poetics by sixteenth-century Protestants should be understood as a falling-away from the creative heights of pagan antiquity: "'heavy-handed morality' that evades 'genuinely tragic questions'," as Lazarus puts it. Brazeau objects in particular to Lurie's dismissive tone. "In spite of the value of Lurie's scholarship, his work is strongly polemic; his treatment of sixteenth-century readings of Aristotle's Poetics is entirely in a negative key." This

approach, Brazeau argues, fails to appreciate the "interpretive creativity" characteristic of commentaries such as Castelvetro's, as well as the effects of such Christianizing in terms of enabling and inspiring contemporary drama, up to and including Shakespeare's tragedies. "Ultimately, religious and moralizing interpretations do not seem to have been at odds with the goal of poetic efficacy, as tacitly assumed by Weinberg, Hathaway, Lurie, and others."<sup>88</sup> "If, for example," Lazarus writes, "someone were to tell me that a certain philosophical young Danish prince left Wittenberg for the English stage with a head full of Seneca and an understanding of tragedy instinct with guilt, judgment, confession, sin, the afterlife, purgation, and its Christian rewards, I might take a guess at what he had been reading."<sup>89</sup>

In fairness to Lurie et al., critical consensus today about the meaning of hamartia is strongly opposed to the interpretation put forward by Castelvetro, as well as the moralizing commentary characteristic of the volume Lazarus calls the "Wittenberg Sophocles." Jan Bremer shows "a continuous semantic shift" in the use of hamartia away from its original, amoral sense in Homer as simply "missing the

mark" towards a denotation of moral error, even as early as Plato. By the time of the New Testament, hamartia had become the term of choice for "sin." In Aristotle's corpus, however, Bremer maintains, the word nonetheless retains its older, morally neutral meaning: "something like ignorance or blunder."<sup>90</sup> As E. R. Dodds observes, "Aristotle was using hamartia here as he uses hamartēma in the Nicomachean Ethics (1135b12) and in the Rhetoric (1374b6) to mean an offence committed in ignorance of some material fact and therefore free from ponēria or kakia [villainy or wickedness]."<sup>91</sup> Gerard Else agrees: "Tragic hamartia is an ignorance or mistake as to certain details."<sup>92</sup> Martha Nussbaum, too, notes that hamartia as Aristotle uses the term is "sharply distinguished from flaw or defect of character." Hamartia in Aristotle's thought is "also distinguished," however, she adds, "from atuchēma, or a mischance that has a purely arbitrary and external origin." "To come to grief through *hamartia* is, then," she explains, "to fall through some sort of mistake in action that is causally intelligible, not simply fortuitous; done in some sense by oneself; and yet not the outgrowth of a settled defective disposition of character."<sup>93</sup> Kathy Eden suggests that Aristotle may have seen hamartia as "the kind of

action best suited to the tragic stage," precisely because it "corresponds the category of actions which in the law court deserve equity rather than strict justice."

Literature is better able than philosophy, perhaps, to analyze these kinds of exceptional cases, in which intentions, as well as particular circumstances, become the pivotal criteria of justice.<sup>94</sup> In any case, as Stephen Halliwell observes, "modern scholarship has moved predominantly toward a much more limited understanding of the term than traditional ideas of a 'tragic flaw' presupposed."<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, as Else notes, "as so often happens, the prevailing conception of hamartia among laymen and scholars in other fields is still that of the 'moral flaw,' which was dominant down through the nineteenth century."<sup>96</sup>

Why is a long-discredited misinterpretation of Aristotle's Poetics still so appealing to Shakespeare scholars? The attraction, I suspect, is no longer the desire to Christianize Aristotle, as it was in the sixteenth century. Instead, the aim seems to be to find a way to protect and preserve a cherished myth. As Brian Cummings recounts in his recent British Academy Shakespeare lecture, scholarship on Shakespeare has a long history of

bias against the idea that he was seriously and sincerely engaged with the religious context of his day.<sup>97</sup> If Aristotle's term hamartia is redefined in terms of moral culpability, then it allows critics to ground their sense of the importance of the "tragic flaw" in Shakespearean tragedy in Aristotle's Poetics, rather than the influence of Christianity. The legend of Shakespeare's secularism is preserved, at the cost of distorting Aristotle.

"Elizabethan drama was almost wholly secular," A. C. Bradley maintains, without pausing even to consider any possible objections.<sup>98</sup> Nowadays, such a blithe, unsupported claim comes across as superficial; uninformed; even slightly surreal. Yet the oversight that it represents has proved tenacious. As Gerard Kilroy protests, in his review of David Kastan's recent book on Shakespeare and religion, A Will to Believe, even if "we cannot know what Shakespeare believed," "we do not have to fashion a poet who would fit neatly into a Manhattan dinner party."<sup>99</sup> "If it is not plausible to read Shakespeare's plays as Christian allegories," concedes Deborah Shuger, "neither is it likely that the popular drama of a religiously saturated culture could, by a secular miracle, have extricated itself from the theocentric orientation informing the discourses of



politics, gender, social order, and history."<sup>100</sup> Even for some scholars still today, however, seeing Shakespeare as participating in earnest in his fervently devout context can feel counterintuitive. As Cummings explains, "the Renaissance as a concept was formulated in strict harmony with the theory of secularization": "the throwing off of the domination of religion" Jakob Burckhardt describes in his Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy. "After Burckhardt, Shakespeare became one of the icons of this way of explaining cultural history." His "secularity" came to be seen as "a key to his identity and his importance." More broadly speaking, "secularity" served as "a foundation stone in the discipline of English." "Secular humanism was central to its self-exposition as the modernist university discipline." To describe Shakespearean tragedy as structurally Christian upsets this familiar narrative. Shakespeare is too central to the canon; too normative; too useful as a standard-bearer. Critics sympathetic to the secularization thesis want to preserve Shakespeare's status as a harbinger of modernity, understood as freedom from traditional religion; Shakespeare is for them a herald of a secular age which somehow, even today, still remains just over the horizon.<sup>101</sup>

How are we to "think about Shakespeare," Cummings asks, "without secularization"? If what we have been calling anagnorisis in his plays can be better understood as repentance, and what we have been calling hamartia as besetting sin, what about the third feature of the Aristotelian tragic plot, peripeteia? In his Poetics, Aristotle argues that the best kind of anagnorisis coincides with a reversal: peripeteia. The unexpected answer to the question, "whodunit?" should be revealed, as in the case of Oedipus, at the very moment that the floor falls out from underneath the hero's hopes for the future. Here again, Austen proves paradigmatic: for overconfident heroines such as Emma, the anagnorisis is itself the peripeteia. Subjectively, at least, if not objectively, the news of the betrayal is itself the bouleversement. The discovery is the reversal: a masterstroke of creative economy.<sup>102</sup> Aristotle's own perspective here is disconcertingly amoral: he admires the aesthetic unity achieved by combining these two elements of the plot, recognition and reversal, much as a connoisseur of poetry might prefer Homer's Iliad to less focused, episodic epics such as the (now-lost) Heracleid or Theseid (1451a20-21). Bromwich finds the passage, nonetheless, an occasion to

consider a deeper ethical truth. "We know from experience that a deeply unsettling and shocking reversal is often the only thing that can precipitate any self-recognition at all in a person of strong will."<sup>103</sup> As far as human nature, Bromwich's point seems sound. What Bromwich means by "self-recognition," however, is very far from what Aristotle means by anagnorisis. I imagine Shakespeare, moreover, would want to factor in another element, a necessary catalyst: the intersubjective process Cavell calls "acknowledgment," and St. Augustine, "confession."

A reversal of fortune, however calamitous it may seem, is not enough on its own to guarantee repentance. In addition, the character must receive and accept corrective feedback from other people. Peripeteia can be helpful to that end: as we know from celebrity scandals, people who have not experienced considerable failure and disappointment are not usually inclined to see themselves as standing in need of ethical advice. Instead, they are prone to what Homer would call atē: the delusions of grandeur attendant upon overweening pride. Everyman must be summoned by Death, before he can be convinced to reconsider the value that he sets on worldly wealth. Saul must be blinded and knocked off his horse, before God can persuade

him to stop persecuting Christians. In his 1978 Harvard commencement address, Alexandr Solzhenitsyn vividly describes the shock that he felt as a dissident from the Soviet Union arriving into exile in the West. There is "a self-deluding interpretation of the contemporary world situation," he recounts discovering, which "works as a sort of a petrified armor around people's minds." "Human voices from 17 countries of Eastern Europe and Eastern Asia cannot pierce it. It will only be broken by the pitiless crowbar of events."<sup>104</sup>

But is a catastrophe necessarily enough to secure a change of heart? As Will Hamlin observes, in Shakespeare's plays, conscience is usually stirred to life, not by external events, but more immediately by some other person, a character whom Hamlin describes as a "god-surrogate." "At times," he explains, "conscience requires provocation; it needs to be nudged."<sup>105</sup> Examples he adduces include the Countess in All's Well that Ends Well confronting Helen about her love for Bertram, as well as Hamlet's speech to Gertrude about her marriage to Claudius. Another he does not mention is Marina in Pericles, when she is held captive in the brothel and by her preaching and virtuous presence converts her would-be clients to lives of chastity. "She

would make a puritan of the devil," the Bawd complains (4.6.17). More complex examples include Hamlet's Mousetrap, as well as the show that Prospero has Ariel put on for the "three men of sin" in The Tempest (3.3.53), snatching away their supposed banquet and rebuking them in the likeness of a harpy.

The most complicated such efforts, however, to evoke the pangs of conscience are the machinations of the Duke in Measure for Measure. "The entire early plot" of this "problem play," Hamlin proposes, can be understood as a kind of Mousetrap for Angelo: "a play-within-a-play conceived on a significantly larger scale than that even in Hamlet." Prospero says of his enemies that his whole "project" consists in their "being penitent" (5.1.28): "heart-sorrow / And a clear life ensuing" (3.3.81-2). The Duke's "project" here seems to be much the same. His multifarious schemes aim to inspire repentance not only in his deputy, Angelo, but also in almost all of the other major characters: Claudio; Juliet; Pompey; even (arguably) Isabella. As they strive to persuade other characters to repent, characters such as the Duke in Measure for Measure, Helena in All's Well that Ends Well, and Prospero in The Tempest can easily seem to be 'playing God', making it

difficult for a present-day audience to find them sympathetic. Hamlin suggests that this impression of "encroaching upon divine prerogative" may perhaps be "usefully reconceived" as their adhering to a "culturally-sanctioned script." They are second-hand agents of the divine, calling sinners to judgment through "the deployment of mimetic representations of truth."<sup>106</sup>

As we soon find out, however, an encounter with what Hamlin calls a "god-surrogate" does not guarantee repentance; no more so than a reversal of fortune. Angelo, Antonio, Bertram: do these characters ever entirely repent? Shakespeare leaves their final state of mind ambiguous. John of Gaunt's incisive rebuke of Richard II, early in the play, seems to make no impression on the petulant young monarch other than to prompt him to insults and recrimination. As York warns Gaunt beforehand, "all in vain comes counsel to his ear" (2.1.4). Later on, Richard leaves the deposition hardly less defiant. Yet he is perhaps not altogether impervious, in the end, to the gaze of the other. As I argue elsewhere, Shakespeare seems to see other people as able to interpellate the self, at least to some extent.<sup>107</sup> Even the disapproving glance of a stranger can induce misgivings; doubts; a shiver of uncertainty about

one's own private, more flattering self-definition. As Christopher Tilmouth notes, for Shakespeare, conscience "constructs itself as another human's presence invading the mind." "It is under that party's gaze, according to his judgment, that man then feels his conduct being evaluated."

108

If a single gaze can prove so powerful, all the more so a great crowd of spectators: hence Cleopatra's horror, as well as Brutus's, at the thought of being led in triumph. After being led in disgrace through the streets of London, Richard arrives before his wife a changed man. "What," she says, alarmed, "is my Richard both in shape and mind / Transformed and weakened?" (5.1.26-27) In speaking with her, Richard begins to regain, however, some of his former self-serving dissociation. Encouraged by her praise, he imagines a different audience, "good old folks" more sympathetic than the jeering former subjects he has just passed by. He muses on the thought of these "hearers weeping" at his "lamentable tale," "the deposing of a rightful king" (5.1.40-50). Heartened by this consoling fantasy, he begins to seem a bit more like his former grandiose self.

Soellner is surely right when he says Richard's "self-discoveries" are "dispersed": "Richard does not achieve a particular culminating discovery comparable to the full and devastating disclosure Oedipus receives of his true situation."<sup>109</sup> Nonetheless, in his final scene, imprisoned at Pomfret, Richard does engage in a few moments of soul-searching self-reproach. A musician he hears outside is off-rhythm; "keep time!" he complains. "How sour sweet music is / When time is broke and no proportion kept" (5.5.42). Then he catches himself.

here have I the daintiness of ear  
 To check time broke in a disordered string,  
 But for the concord of my state and time  
 Had not an ear to hear my true time broke.  
 I wasted time, and now doth Time waste me. (5.5.45-49)

What Richard realizes here in his reflections on "time" is what a phenomenologist might call the "givenness" of external reality.<sup>110</sup> No matter how lively or imaginative our internal subjectivity might be, it is not a viable, sustainable alternative to the more objective world outside. We cannot escape altogether into our own



fantasies; "time," at least, will still come calling, even inside Hamlet's "nutshell" or Richard's own "hollow crown." What starts as a play on words thus becomes serious; Richard emerges, as it were, from the bubble of his solipsism. And as if on cue, he starts to notice other people. He becomes thankful for the music: "blessing on his heart that gives it me," he concludes, "For 'tis a sign of love" (5.5.64-65). A "Groom of the Stable" enters, hailing Richard as "royal Prince," and Richard's reply is remarkable: "Thanks, noble peer" (5.5.67).

Cavell's analysis of King Lear sheds some light on the importance of these two brief exchanges. Cavell proposes that Lear's persistent "avoidance of love" reflects his desire "to avoid recognition, the shame of exposure, the threat of self-revelation."<sup>111</sup> Coriolanus as Cavell sees him is a variation on the same pattern: he is not willing to accept compliments, because he does not want to admit to himself that he is in any sense dependent on other people. Richard's gratitude, by this light, for the music played in his honor is both an effect and a reward of his repentance. In becoming more honest with himself about his own nature, he discovers that he is able to participate in "love." Richard's change of heart, in other words, such as it is,

coincides with a newfound respect and appreciation for these two lower-class well-wishers, the off-stage musician and the on-stage stablehand. A similar moment occurs in King Lear, when, as Lear says, his "wits begin to turn" (3.2.67). "How dost my boy?" he asks the Fool. "Art cold? / I am cold myself" (3.2.68-69). His incipient recognition that he himself might be morally flawed, "sinning" as well as "sinned against" (3.2.59), coincides with a more grounded awareness of his relation to another human being, a pathetic figure who until then had been the object of his scorn and anger. Recognition and repentance enable and reinforce each other; self-knowledge and acknowledgment turn out to be inseparable.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David Bromwich, "What Shakespeare's Heroes Learn," *Raritan* 29 (2010): 132.

<sup>2</sup> Rolf Soellner, Shakespeare's Patterns of Self-Knowledge (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972), xi.

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<sup>3</sup> For a history of the development of Stoic anxiety about the passions into Christian concern about sin in late antiquity, see Richard Sorabji, Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Exceptions include, notably, Terence Cave in his massive diachronic study, Recognitions: A Study in Poetics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 271-92. See also Sarah Beckwith, Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2011), 97, 105.

<sup>5</sup> Kathy Eden, Poetic and Legal Fiction in the Aristotelian Tradition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Eden, Poetic and Legal Fiction, 24.

<sup>7</sup> T. S. Eliot, Edinburgh Lectures II, 18, in Eliot, The Development of Shakespeare's Verse (John Davy Hayward Collection of King's College, Cambridge, 1937); quoted in John Freeh, "Pericles and 'Marina': T. S. Eliot's Search for the Transcendent in the Late Shakespeare," in Shakespeare's Last Plays: Essays in Literature and Politics, ed. Stephen W. Smith and Travis Curtright (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002), 112-13.

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<sup>8</sup> Piero Boitani, The Gospel According to Shakespeare, trans. Vittorio Montemaggi and Rachel Jacoff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 68.

<sup>9</sup> Patchen Markell, Bound by Recognition (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 7.

<sup>10</sup> Markell, Bound by Recognition, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Markell, Bound by Recognition, 36.

<sup>12</sup> Markell, Bound by Recognition, 63.

<sup>13</sup> Markell, Bound by Recognition, 79.

<sup>14</sup> Martha Nussbaum, The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>15</sup> T. S. Eliot, Edinburgh Lecture II, quoted in Freeh, "Pericles and 'Marina'," 111.

<sup>16</sup> Boitani, Gospel, 39.

<sup>17</sup> On Shakespeare's deliberate departure from the conventions and Weltanschauung of Senecan tragedy, see Patrick Gray, "Shakespeare vs. Seneca: Competing Visions of Human Dignity," in Brill's Companion to the Reception of Senecan Tragedy: Scholarly, Theatrical, and Literary Receptions, ed. Eric Dodson-Robinson (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 203-32. Cp. Gordon Braden, "Senecan

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Tragedy and the Renaissance," Illinois Classical Studies 9, no. 2 (1984): 277-92.

<sup>18</sup> Bromwich, "Heroes," 132.

<sup>19</sup> Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 212.

<sup>20</sup> For lucid exposition of Hegel's concept of Anerkennung, see Robert R. Williams, Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); Hegel's Ethics of Recognition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God: Studies in Hegel and Nietzsche (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, translated by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 111.

<sup>22</sup> See especially Stanley Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging," in Must We Mean What We Say? (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 238-66, as well as Cavell, Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Cavell, Disowning Knowledge, 104.

<sup>24</sup> Markell, Bound by Recognition, 35.

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<sup>25</sup> M. Scott Peck, People of the Lie: Hope for Healing Human Evil (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 69, 75.

<sup>26</sup> St. Augustine, De civitate dei 14.4, translated by Paul Griffiths, quoted in Griffiths, Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 86.

<sup>27</sup> St. Augustine, Confessiones 4.16.31, translated by Paul Griffiths, quoted in Griffiths, Lying, 56.

<sup>28</sup> Griffiths, Lying, 55.

<sup>29</sup> St. Augustine, De trinitate 12.9.14, translated by Paul Griffiths, quoted in Griffiths, Lying, 62.

<sup>30</sup> St. Augustine, Enarrationes in psalmos 91.6, translated by Paul Griffiths, quoted in Griffiths, Lying, 87.

<sup>31</sup> St. Augustine, In Iohannis evangelium tractatus 12.13, translated by Paul Griffiths, quoted in Griffiths, Lying, 92.

<sup>32</sup> Cavell, Disowning Knowledge, 122.

<sup>33</sup> Christopher Tilmouth, "Shakespeare's Open Consciences," Renaissance Studies 23, no. 4 (2009): 514.

<sup>34</sup> Peck, People of the Lie, 124.

<sup>35</sup> Cavell, Disowning Knowledge, 96.

<sup>36</sup> Peck, People of the Lie, 72.

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- <sup>37</sup> Ernest Schanzer, The Problem Plays of Shakespeare (London: Routledge, 2005; 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1963), 59.
- <sup>38</sup> Ruth Nevo, Tragic Form in Shakespeare (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015; 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1972), 211-13.
- <sup>39</sup> T. S. Eliot, "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," in Elizabethan Essays (New York: Haskell House, 1964), 38-40.
- <sup>40</sup> Soellner, Self-Knowledge, 278-79.
- <sup>41</sup> A. D. Nuttall, Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure? (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 97-98.
- <sup>42</sup> Nevo, Tragic Form, 299.
- <sup>43</sup> Soellner, Self-Knowledge, 322.
- <sup>44</sup> Bromwich, "Heroes," 139-40.
- <sup>45</sup> Cavell, Disowning Knowledge, 68.
- <sup>46</sup> Bromwich, "Heroes," 144.
- <sup>47</sup> Soellner, Self-Knowledge, 352.
- <sup>48</sup> Bromwich, "Heroes," 144.
- <sup>49</sup> A. D. Nuttall, Shakespeare the Thinker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 98, 149.
- <sup>50</sup> Eliot, "Stoicism of Seneca," 40.
- <sup>51</sup> Nuttall, Thinker, 88-89, 147.
- <sup>52</sup> G. Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire (London: Routledge, 1959), 97-119.

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<sup>53</sup> Soellner, Self-Knowledge, 110, xiii.

<sup>54</sup> Nuttall, Pleasure?, 96.

<sup>55</sup> Simon Haines, "Recognition in Shakespeare and Hegel," in Shakespeare and Emotions: Inheritances, Enactments, Legacies, edited by R. S. White, Mark Houlahan, and Katrina O'Loughlin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 219.

<sup>56</sup> Soellner, Self-Knowledge, 111.

<sup>57</sup> Haines, "Recognition," 229.

<sup>58</sup> All quotations from Shakespeare's plays are taken from The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works, edited by Ann Thompson, Richard Proudfoot, and David Scott Kastan (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama for the Arden Shakespeare, 2011).

<sup>59</sup> Blair Hoxby, What was Tragedy? Theory and the Early Modern Canon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1.

<sup>60</sup> Hoxby, What was Tragedy?, 6-7.

<sup>61</sup> For a more detailed critique of Romantic appropriation of Shakespeare, see Patrick Gray, "Seduced by Romanticism: Re-imagining Shakespearean Catharsis," in The Routledge Companion to Shakespeare and Philosophy, ed. Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne (New York and London: Routledge, in press).



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<sup>62</sup> See Hoxby, What was Tragedy?, 10, 25-26, 290-93, on A. C. Bradley's acclaimed but nonetheless questionable effort to reconcile Shakespeare and Hegel in Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy.

<sup>63</sup> Hoxby, What was Tragedy?, 56. For an analogous Romantic view of Shakespeare as secular sage and forerunner of modernity, cp. not only A. C. Bradley but also the earlier, influential German criticism of G. G. Gervinus. For a review of scholarship to date exploring Shakespeare's interest in what Hoxby dismisses as "moral system," including classical schools of thought about ethics such as Stoicism and Epicureanism, as well as Christianity, see Patrick Gray and Helen Clifford, "Shakespeare, William," in The Encyclopedia of Renaissance Philosophy, ed. Marco Sgarbi (New York and London: Springer, in press). See also Patrick Gray and John D. Cox, eds., Shakespeare and Renaissance Ethics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>64</sup> As this formulation of my argument suggests, I very precisely disagree with Richard Strier's neo-Romantic representation of Shakespeare in Strier, The Unrepentant

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Renaissance (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 98-149.

<sup>65</sup> A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (London: Macmillan, 1919), 29.

<sup>66</sup> Stephen Halliwell, "Commentary," in The Poetics of Aristotle, translated by Stephen Halliwell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 127. Halliwell cites A. P. McMahon, "Seven Questions on Aristotelian Definitions of Tragedy and Comedy," Harvard Studies in Philology 40 (1929): 97-198.

<sup>67</sup> Bruce Smith, Ancient Scripts and Modern Experience (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 202.

<sup>68</sup> Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, translated by Willard Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003; 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1953), 318-19.

<sup>69</sup> Bromwich, "Heroes," 146.

<sup>70</sup> See, e.g. Isaiah Berlin, The Roots of Romanticism, edited by Henry Hardy (London: Pimlico, 2000), 56: "In a certain sense, of course, it is an application of Christianity," etc.

<sup>71</sup> For a more reliable and straightforward explanation of this history than Foucault's History of Sexuality, see esp.

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Henri F. Ellenberger, The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 43-46. For a detailed and intriguing biographical account of Freud's engagement with Christianity, see Paul C. Vitz, Sigmund Freud's Christian Unconscious (New York: Guilford Press, 1988).

<sup>72</sup> Bradley, Tragedy, 20.

<sup>73</sup> Alexander Pope, "Moral Essays: Epistle to Cobham," line 174; cp. "Essay on Man: Epistle II," 131-38: "one master Passion in the breast," etc., in The Poems of Alexander Pope: A Reduced Version of the Twickenham Text, edited by John Butt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963).

<sup>74</sup> Pope, "Epistle to Cobham," line 178.

<sup>75</sup> Laurence Sterne, The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, in The Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne, vols. 1-2, edited by Melvin New and Joan New (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1978), book 2, chapter 5, page 106.

<sup>76</sup> Caspar Huberinus, A riche storehouse, or treasurie, for the sicke, full of Christian counsels holesome doctrines, comfortable persuasions, and godly meditations, meete for all Christians, both in sicknesse and in health. Wherevnto

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is annexed a comfort for poore prisoners, and also an exhortation to repentance, trans. Thomas Godfrey (London: Ralph Newberry, 1578), 93.

<sup>77</sup> Edward Topsell, The revvard of religion Deliuered in sundrie lectures vpon the booke of Ruth, wherein the godly may see their daily and outwarde tryals, with the presence of God to assist them, and his mercies to recompence them: verie profitable for this present time of dearth, wherein manye are most pittifully tormented with want; and also worthie to bee considered in this golden age of the preaching of the word, when some vomit vp the loathsomnes therof, and others fall away to damnable securitie. (London: John Windet, 1596), 195.

<sup>78</sup> For further discussion, see John Gillies, "The Question of Original Sin in Hamlet," Shakespeare Quarterly 64, no. 4 (2013): 396-424.

<sup>79</sup> Walter Kaufmann, Tragedy and Philosophy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 62, 275.

<sup>80</sup> De Anima, 430a10-25.

<sup>81</sup> For a sense of the richness of this history of interpretation, see, e.g., Herbert A. Davidson, Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect: Their Cosmologies,

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Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>82</sup> Cave, Recognitions, 37.

<sup>83</sup> Michael Lurie, "Facing Up to Tragedy: Toward an Intellectual History of Sophocles in Europe from Camerarius to Nietzsche," in A Companion to Sophocles, ed. Kirk Ormand (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 440-61. For a much more detailed treatment of this history, see Lurie's earlier monograph, Die Suche Nach der Schuld. Sophokles' Oedipus Rex, Aristoteles' Poetik und das Tragödienverständnis der Neuzeit (K. G. Saur: Munich and Leipzig, 2004), 13-91.

<sup>84</sup> Philipp Melanchthon, Cohortatio Philippi Melanchthonis ad legendas tragoedias et comoedias, in P. Terentii Comoediae sex, cum prioribus ferme castigationibus et plerisque explicationibus (Leipzig, 1546), 568; cited in Lurie, "Facing Up," 443.

<sup>85</sup> Lurie, "Facing Up," 444. Cp. Micha Lazarus, Aristotle's Poetics in Renaissance England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). See also Micha Lazarus, 'Aristotelian Criticism in Sixteenth-Century England', in Oxford Handbooks Online (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

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<sup>86</sup> Bryan Brazeau, "'My Own Worst Enemy': Translating Hamartia in Sixteenth-Century Italy," forthcoming in Renaissance and Reformation. The author would like to thank Bryan for allowing him to read a copy in advance of publication.

<sup>87</sup> Lazarus, Micha. "Reformation Poetics and the Wittenberg Sophocles." Paper presented at Poetics Before Modernity, Trinity College, Cambridge, 14 December 2017. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935338.013.148.

<sup>88</sup> Bernard Weinberg, A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 1:111-55; Baxter Hathaway, The Age of Criticism: The Late Renaissance in Italy (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1962).

<sup>89</sup> Lazarus, "Reformation Poetics."

<sup>90</sup> Jan Maarten Bremer, Hamartia: Tragic Error in the Poetics of Aristotle and in Greek Tragedy (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1969), 61-63.

<sup>91</sup> E. R. Dodds, "On Misunderstanding Oedipus Rex," Greece and Rome 13, no. 1 (1966), 39.

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<sup>92</sup> Gerard Else, Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), 383, 379 n. 45.

<sup>93</sup> Nussbaum, Fragility of Goodness, 382-3. Cp. Nancy Sherman, "Hamartia and Virtue," in Essays on Aristotle's Poetics, edited by Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 177-96.

<sup>94</sup> Eden, Legal and Poetic Fiction, 53.

<sup>95</sup> Halliwell, "Commentary," 128. For a more recent discussion, see Ho Kim, "Aristotle's Hamartia Reconsidered," Harvard Studies in Classical Philology 105 (2010): 33-52.

<sup>96</sup> Else, Aristotle's Poetics, 379 n. 45.

<sup>97</sup> Brian Cummings, "Shakespeare and the Reformation" (British Academy Shakespeare Lecture, London, 1 May 2012). See also his slightly later monograph, Mortal Thoughts: Religion, Secularity, and Identity in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1-18.

<sup>98</sup> Bradley, Tragedy, 25.

<sup>99</sup> Gerard Kilroy, "In All Conscience," Times Literary Supplement, 22 July 2015. Review of Brian Cummings, Mortal

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Thoughts, Hannibal Hamlin, The Bible in Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), and David Scott Kastan, A Will to Believe: Shakespeare and Religion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). URL: <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/in-all-conscience/>

<sup>100</sup> Deborah K. Shuger, "Subversive Fathers and Suffering Subjects: Shakespeare and Christianity," in Religion, Politics, and Literature in Post-Reformation England, 1540-1688, ed. Donna B. Hamilton and Richard Strier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 46.

<sup>101</sup> On the alignment of literary studies with the secularization thesis, as well as a discussion of some of the blind spots this bias can create, see Gauri Viswanathan, "Secularism in the Framework of Heterodoxy," PMLA 123, no. 2 (2008): 466-76.

<sup>102</sup> On parallels between the plots of Austen's novels and the conventions of classical comedy, see Laura Mooneyham White, "Emma and New Comedy," Persuasions 21 (1999): 128-41.

<sup>103</sup> Bromwich, "Heroes," 146.



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<sup>104</sup> Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, 327<sup>th</sup> Commencement Address, Harvard University, 8 June 1978. URL: [https://harvardmagazine.com/sites/default/files/1978 Alexander Solzhenitsyn.pdf](https://harvardmagazine.com/sites/default/files/1978_Alexander_Solzhenitsyn.pdf). Cp. e.g. Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

<sup>105</sup> William M. Hamlin, "Conscience and the God-Surrogate in Montaigne and Measure for Measure," in Shakespeare and Renaissance Ethics, ed. Gray and Cox, 243 ff. See also Hamlin, Montaigne's English Journey: Reading the Essays in Shakespeare's Day (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 110-28.

<sup>106</sup> Hamlin, "God-surrogate," 245.

<sup>107</sup> See Patrick Gray, "Shakespeare et la reconnaissance: l'Anerkennung comme interpellation intersubjective," in Shakespeare au risque de la philosophie, ed. Pascal Drouet et Philippe Grosos (Paris: Éditions Hermann, 2017), 159-82, as well as Patrick Gray, Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic: Selfhood, Stoicism, and Civil War (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, in press).

<sup>108</sup> Tilmouth, "Shakespeare's Open Consciences," 503.

<sup>109</sup> Soellner, Self-Knowledge, 110.

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<sup>110</sup> Cp. Marilynne Robinson, The Givenness of Things (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2015), esp. the reflections on time in the essay, "Experience."

<sup>111</sup> Cavell, Disowning Knowledge, 58.

<sup>112</sup> Cp. Boitani, Gospel, 30, on Lear's exchange with Poor Tom.